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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critical analysis of events that surrounded the efforts of four mothers to gain access to the educational decision-making process. A basic premise is that a hegemonic relationship based upon gender pervades American education. The roles of administrator and parent are "gendered" concepts that affect the ways that people in these roles are treated. This case study, based on participant observation, examines the hegemony of gender in one small, rural, midwestern school district, where an administration perception was that all the school's problems were caused by "four bitches and a prick at the newspaper." The four women had handicapped children receiving special services, and they encountered administration resistance when they insisted on actively participating in educational decisions concerning their children. All administrators and board of education members, except the board president, were male. The real "problem" was that the four women asked questions and demanded answers; they moved outside the role allotted to them by the organization. They organized a parent support group, brought their grievances to the board of education, and, finally, filed a civil rights complaint. The local newspaper editor criticized the board's inaccessibility. After a climactic board meeting, the administration's control began to unravel. The district was found guilty of civil rights violations and of harassing parents and students; the administration lost credibility; and board members and administrators were replaced. The use of language to control perceptions and maintain the dominant ideology is discussed. This paper contains 38 references. (SV)

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CASE STUDY OF HEGEMONIC CONFRONTATION IN A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT: FOUR WOMEN AND A PRICK AT THE NEWSPAPER

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A Case Study of Hegemonic Confrontation
in a Rural School District:
Four Women and a Prick at the Newspaper

The purpose of the paper is to present a critical case study account and analysis of events that surrounded the efforts of four women to gain access to the educational decision making process. The basic premise of this research is that a hegemonic relationship based upon gender pervades American education. This case study examines the hegemony of gender in one, small, rural school district in the Midwest. The dominant ideology is expressed in the widely held administrative perception that all of the school's problems were caused by "four bitches and a prick at the newspaper."

Critical theory maintains that the social context of education must be critically examined for its effects upon the conditions of power and authority in the schools. Hegemony and its abuses are seen as the result of an uncritical acceptance of the status quo. While much of the literature in education informed by Critical Theory focuses upon the empowerment of teachers and students, this project extends the research by examining the process of parental empowerment.

It is our position that the concepts administrator and parent are "gendered" concepts that constitute the ways that individuals who fill those roles are treated. This case study examines these "gendered" roles in order to explain the activity that took place and the interactions that evolved and continue to evolve in this community. Exemplars listed by Smith (1982)

included: studies of students; studies of teachers; and studies of administrators. Smith's (1982) review listed no studies of parents. This study is unique in this regard.

Methodology and Data Sources

For the last two years there has been an ongoing struggle between four parents and the administration over the parents' participation in decisions about their handicapped children. One of the researchers lives in the rural community and has assumed the role of participant-observer. Over the past two years ongoing communication has been established between the researcher, parents, Board members, newspaper editor, and administration within the district. The other researcher has assumed the role of observer-participant. She has conducted interviews, reviewed documents and artifacts from the data file, and participated in activities in the community related to the ongoing situation.

The central themes of this research involve philosophical and moral issues. It is important to explicate the ethical commitment of the researchers. This project was guided by two principles which protect the rights of human subjects: informed consent and anonymity (Smith, 1984). The anonymity of subjects is protected through the use of code names for each proper name in the account.

Case study methodology is appropriate when the purpose of the research is expansionist or theory-building (Stake, 1978).

One perspective missing from previous naturalistic research literature in education has been that of parents. Codd (1982) suggests that it is important to examine sociological issues in education, particularly special education, because these are fundamentally philosophical and moral issues. A case study perspective on parental involvement in the schools will expand educational theory.

The utilization of participant-observer, as well as, observer-participant and insider-outsider (Smith, 1984) techniques, along with structured and unstructured interviews, served to enhance the reliability of data collection. Interviews were a blend of open-ended and focused questions as well as a narrative conversation between the researchers and each interviewee. Collective interviews were also conducted to examine particular events and their interpretation by the group. All interviews were taped (video or audio) by the researchers and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) was used to secure the reliability and validity of the data. Interviews were checked against letters, newspaper coverage, video, and audio tapes (Denzin, 1978).

Collection of data involved interviews of parents, administrators, school board members, teachers, and community members. Other sources of data include: Board of Education minutes from March, 1989 to the present; newspaper accounts of the Board meetings collected since January of 1989; school

district policies; State department records; budget records over the last four (4) years; community attitudes, as reflected in the call-in section and letters to the editor in the bi-weekly newspaper since March, 1989; external, written communication from administration to the parents; personal letters; legal documents, including the final reports of the Office of Civil Rights; and video-tapes of Board of Education meetings since March of 1989.

The results of early observations are presented in the following vignette: "Four Bitches and a Prick at the Newspaper." The vignette along with additional background data are critiqued in the section: "Confronting Hegemonic Masculinity." The vignette and critique present an emerging view of the hegemony of gender in a small rural school district in the midwest.

Four Bitches and a Prick at the Newspaper

"You girls are here. You want to take your seats?" The "girls" moved to four chairs located in front of the woman in charge. She spoke again; this time they tried to interrupt her. "Girls, excuse me. If you will let me go on I think we can address this issue."

The "notorious November 15th Board meeting" had begun. Nan Black was seated in the center of the middle table, one of three that were pushed together. Directly behind her was a large, green palm. The fronds from the palm rose high above her head. To her far left was the state flag. Nan Black was the president

of the Board of Education. She was surrounded by five other members of the Board of Education, the Board secretary, and two administrators. Drs. Jones and Smith, the superintendent and his assistant, sat at opposite ends of the table facing one another. Who could conceive that within a year not one of the them would remain in the same position.

Mrs. Black suggested that they develop a "spirit of working together" and asked the "girls" for their suggestions on how to handle the matter. Without waiting for a response she said emphatically, "This is how I suggest that we do it and this is the way we are going to do it." Mr. Ford, vice-president of the Board of Education, began to speak. Again, the girls tried to interrupt. Mrs. Black interjected: " Ahum, ahum, ahum... I believe that Mr. Ford is talking. Do you think it would be a little more polite not to interrupt him until he finishes his sentence?" Mr. Ford finished his sentence, and another, and another.

The "girls" sat in wooden chairs with no armrests. The chairs were approximately six feet from the long row of three tables where the Board members were seated. They were directly in front of the center table. A microphone separated the "girls" from the Board members and administrators.

"You've never admitted there was a problem!" one of the "girls" snapped. She was frustrated. Her anger was obvious. Mr. Ford's voice became somber. "There is a problem here," he

said.

The "problem" began almost a year ago. Each one of the "girls" had transferred her child to the public school in order to access special services. Each met with varying degrees of resistance from the administration when they insisted on actively participating in the educational decisions concerning their children.

It took Katie Hahs three years to get her son tested and placed in a class for the learning disabled. Joan Manson requested an occupational therapist and a masters prepared speech pathologist for her severely language impaired son. District personnel asked her if her son was "walking into walls" and offered the services of a speech pathologist whose master's degree was in administration. Sarah Farmer was viewed as a real threat by the district because "she has more toll-free numbers than MA Bell." Natasha Read's daughter received excellent special services. The superintendent was the best man at her parents' wedding, although he didn't come around as often lately.

The real "problem" was that these four women asked questions and demanded answers. One of them recalled coming to the PTO meeting that brought them together: "Nobody talked. Nobody stood up. Nobody said a damn thing. It was a talent show. I resented that... It was cut and dried. The president came up, banged the gavel." That meeting made them aware that there was no legitimate forum for expressing parental concerns except on an

individual basis with the administration. These four women spent the next six months establishing that forum. They organized a group called "Face to Face." They answered questions raised by other parents of handicapped children and formulated more questions for the administration and Board of Education.

A month before the notorious November meeting, the four women were denied placement on the Board agenda because their "request was too brief." It was district policy that anyone who wanted to speak to the Board must "write up" the presentation and have it approved by the superintendent. Since they were formally rejected, they gave their presentation during the "Patrons" report section "when patrons are permitted to speak." They did so knowing that Board policy also prevented any action on their report or any response to their questions at that meeting.

The "notorious November 15th Board meeting" was designed to respond to questions raised by the four women a month earlier. There were ten "areas of concern" that the women felt needed to be addressed: statistics on students being served; use of outside opinions in evaluating students; treatment of parents by district staff; non-compliance; testing and evaluation; student retention; district mastery objectives; programs available to "at risk" students; support between special and regular education; and learning programs for special needs pre-schoolers. Mrs. Black was ready with her answers.

"Are these your questions? Are these your questions?" Mrs.

Black asked. She was affirmed by some unspoken signal and continued, "Yes, these are your questions!" She would ask this same question each time she addressed a new issue from her prepared script. It was as if she were a trial attorney and they were on the witness stand. The "girls" made an attempt to explain that it was important to keep the questions in the proper context. Mrs. Black ignored them.

This meeting was being conducted in the junior high library. It didn't have seating like the Board office where the meetings usually took place. The customary arrangement was to have anyone who was to address the Board sit in the "hotseat" as it came to be known by administrators and Board members. The table in the Board office was shaped in a large "U". Each Board member sat around the outer perimeter of the "U", while the two central office administrators occupied the semi-circular ends of the table. In October, the founders of "Face to Face" were ceremoniously placed in the middle of the "U" between the two administrators. At this November 15th meeting, the "U" was straightened but the symbolic value of the "hotseat" remained.

The junior high library seemed to be the place where contentious Board meetings were held. Five years ago Nan Black sat as a Board member in this very room while the Board held a meeting to discuss the status of Dr. Harry Jones, then the Assistant Superintendent. He had not been recommended for rehiring by the superintendent and had every intention of

fighting it.

He succeeded in keeping his job only because Sherryl Flyer, president of the Board at the time, used a technicality to manipulate the vote in Dr. Jones' favor. In response, the superintendent resigned along with two male Board members who walked out in protest. Within minutes, Dr. Jones was named superintendent by the remaining Board members. Mrs. Flyer was supporting Dr. Jones, who had family and friends in the audience. In contrast, Mrs. Flyer had no family, friends, or supporters in the audience; she subsequently lost her bid for re-election.

Now, on November 15th, the "Face to Face" group had over fifty supporters in the audience. Mr. Ford repeatedly criticized the "Face to Face" group for insufficient documentation of problems with Special Services despite the fact that a member of the audience, Donna Baker, had documentation and spoke out about years of difficulty trying to get services for her daughter. Mrs. Black immediately stifled her by citing Board protocol which mandated that the Board deal only with the issues already on the table. "Besides", she said, "We don't like to talk about individual students." Baker's frustration with the system grew. She was tired of being ignored. Even a trip to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education had been to no avail. This "notorious November 15th Board meeting" was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. The four women couldn't get a word in. There was no recognition of the issues, let alone solutions.

There was no hope that this Board was going to listen. Mrs. Baker recorded her frustration twelve days later, prior to filing a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights.

> Here I sit all alone in the early hours of the morning, when once again sleep eludes me. The studying, figuring, worrying, trying to decide just what I can do next. Wondering just what went wrong that put me in the middle of all of this... It doesn't seem fair, it doesn't make sense. I'm not asking for the world, nor to become a millionaire. I'm not asking for a key to the city, nor for my daughter to be placed on the honor roll. All I want is for my daughter to be given the help she so desperately needs in order to get a proper and complete education with a diploma at the end. It all seems so unbelievable, so unreal. These things happen in Russia, Poland, Iran or Cuba. But not here. Not in America. We are suppose (sic) to be free, to have choices, rights, and the opportunity to obtain quality education in order to build a brighter, better nation, whether these children are black, white, yellow, or red; blind, deaf, mute, or learning disabled; Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish, or Atheist. What has happened? ...What in the world has happened? (D. Baker, personal communication, November 27, 1989)

Nan Black was also frustrated at the November 15th meeting.

She knew it was different from all others that she had conducted. Typically, she would defer to the superintendent who would run the meeting. On November 15th the superintendent spoke three times during the entire two hours, and only then when asked. Mrs. Black took a planned, hard line with the four women. It didn't work. Six months later she shared here reflections in a letter to one of the women:

> ...As president of the Board, I would make some changes in that meeting if I were to do it again. First of all, I would clarify at the very beginning that the Parent Group was there to have their questions answered. They had already given their presentation at the October meeting....there was no reason to repeat the presentation and/or the questions since the Board was fully aware of both the presentation and the questions, not to mention that the Board had a written transcript in front of them....I believe that the Parent Group and others present at the meeting perceived that I "cut off" the Parents (sic) presentation: this is not true the presentation was not "cut off", because it had already been given in its entirety at the October meeting....The lack of clarification at the very beginning was a big mistake on my part and unfortunately set a negative tone for the rest of the meeting. (Nan Black, personal

communication, March 27, 1990)

Public interest about the "notorious November 15th Board meeting" quickly mounted. This was due in large measure to the news media. The publisher of the newspaper had written an editorial criticizing the Board's inaccessibility. He used the difficulties that the "Face to Face" group was having to reinforce his point. His editor, Tiffany Lane, attended all Board meetings and provided extensive coverage of Board activities. The publisher and editor were viewed with suspicion by the Board and their motives were frequently called into question.

The combination of the four women who formed "Face to Face" and a sympathetic news media were two forces the Board of Education could not deal with effectively. After the November 15th meeting, the administration's control began to unravel: the district lost their first and only due process hearing; the Office of Civil Rights found the district guilty of civil rights violations and of harassing parents and their children; the administration lost credibility; and the Board itself underwent major changes.

A new Board member took the place of one who had moved from the district. Two new Board members were elected. A fourth new Board member, the husband of one of the co-founders of "Face to Face," was appointed to fill the unexpired term of a Board member who passed away. Nan Black was deposed as president and replaced

by the male Board member who had quit in protest five years earlier. The Director of Special Services was asked to leave and did. The superintendent quit and was later told by the Board to stay home until his contract expired. Until this meeting, school officials never publicly admitted that the district had a problem. On numerous occasions they insisted that there never was a problem. The problem was the "four bitches and the prick at the newspaper."

Confronting Hegemonic Masculinity

The explicit expectation of Public Law 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, is that the school district must act as an educational advocate for the students that it serves. When this does not occur there are mechanisms that aid parents who seek resolution to problems that result from fundamental disagreements with the school district. Usually disagreements center around the provision of services which are often deemed too costly and unnecessary by the administration, but which the parents consider to be essential for the full development of their child.

John Codd (1982) contends that "...the field of special education has been especially prone to forms of technical domination and political manipulation in which the underlying ethical dilemmas have remained largely unexamined" (p. 9). The purpose of this case study project was to examine domination and manipulation by the Board and the administration. Gender emerged

as the key factor in the hegemonic relationship that existed between the school district and the parents. It was important to examine the notion of organizational hegemony from a perspective that included gender as a key variable in the organizational structure.

Hegemony of Gender

This study examined hegemony of gender as it became manifest in the Board, the central office, and the parents in the community who were attempting to gain access to the decision-making process that involved their handicapped children. The process of hegemony operated not only between the school and the parents but also within each woman and her own consciousness (Giroux, 1983; Sharp, 1980).

While it is important to examine the dominant ideology as expressed by the activities of the Board and the administration, it is equally important to examine the subordinate ideology manifested in the women. The analysis of the hegemony of gender reveals some insight into the way that the women experienced the situation and subsequently acted upon it. Gramsci (1971) referred to this as "common sense." Giroux (1988) expands Gramsci's idea by suggesting that persons must speak with their own voices before they can move outside their own frames of reference and challenge the "common sense" that prohibits formation of an authentic individual.

In this case study there appeared to be resistance on two

very different levels--an organizational one and a sexual one. First, the school district was attempting to assert control over the education of the children. This ultimately resulted in a struggle between the dominant and subordinant ideologies. What is not so clear is the development of a consciousness (Giroux, 1983) in the four women who co-founded "Face to Face" and in the Board president. The president attempted to act out the ideological image that the dominant culture required, but she failed. Gender was a factor in the failure of this woman to portray the "right" image of the dominant class. That is, while the image may have been <u>right</u> (for their purposes) in terms of the organizational values of assertiveness, control, dominance, and power, it was wrong in terms of gender. A relatively successful dominant ideology failed, in part, because it was cast by a woman.

This symbolic transvestitism could not carry the ideology. Gender is a variable of tremendous import in the analysis and interpretation of organizational structures and in the ideology that the organization must promote in order to survive. Gender can prohibit the successful transmission of ideology. The idea that gender acts as a vehicle for the transmission of ideology is a powerful one. It provides another perspective for looking at the relationships of domination, subordination, and gender discrimination. We contend that gender discrimination results in domination and subordination <u>not</u> that domination and

subordination result in discrimination. The power of this subtle distinction to explain the relationship of the three needs to be explored.

Ideology

Ideology serves as a fundamental theoretical tool that promotes and, in some cases, determines the nature of hegemony. Donald & Hall (1986) point out that ideology has two functions. The positive function serves to provide individuals with the necessary ideas, concepts, categories, and images that aid in the development of a consciousness that helps them make sense of the world and their place in it. This function carries with it the implicit suggestion that individuals can and do act as agents in the development and understanding of their universe.

On the other hand, the negative function of ideology is to posit certain perspectives as generally descriptive of the "state of nature." This ignores the possibility that other perspectives exist. That is, ideology is selective, restrictive, and exclusionary. This function admits of structuralism (Althusser, 1969, 1970, 1971; Derrida, 1977; Foucault, 1977). The dualism between individual agency and exclusionary structure can serve to facilitate a dialectic so that both retain the critical potential necessary for understanding not only domination and subordination but resistance. It is this intense dialectic (Giroux, 1983; Adorno, 1973; Marcuse, 1960) that informs the case study under investigation here.

It is important to investigate the positive aspects of the ideology that were being negotiated in the school district during the past two years. Examination of the ideas, images, concepts, and categories that framed the activities of the parents and the school district officials should help explain those activities and actions. It became equally important to examine how the organizational ideology was imposed as "generally descriptive of the state of nature" and how that restrictive and exclusionary ideology masked the development of consciousness in the case study participants. This seems to be one of the keys to domination - a sort of "winning by default."

Thompson (1987) describes the mechanisms through which ideological advantage is maintained: legitimization; dissimulation; fragmentation; and reification. Each of these mechanisms speaks to the activity of the dominant group. What becomes immediately apparent is the absence of an explanation for the activity of the subordinate group. The notions of contestation and resistance play a fundamental role, along with domination, in the understanding of how ideology operates in a given situation (Foucault, 1980; Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977).

Foucault (1980) provides some insight with his "technology of the self." This idea uses valued and discarded images of the self to help individuals develop "public" definitions of who they are. McLaren (1989) suggests that these definitions "position" the individual and thereby determine consciousness and future

"possibilities for experience" (p. 202). He recognizes that these positions are "always already" gendered and must be understood as such by those wishing to develop new forms of social practices that enable rather than constrain human liberation.

Gender, then, becomes an important element in the analysis of organizational ideology and hegemony. To ignore gender "is to romanticize modes of resistance even when they contain reactionary views about women (Giroux, 1983, p. 105). The irony Giroux points out, is that much of the neo-Marxist work, while committed to emancipation, ends up reproducing sexist attitudes and practices (Arnot, 1981; McRobbie, 1980; Walkerdine, 1981).

Gender and Gendered Organizations

"Gendered position" (Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987) is an important theoretical construct for two reasons. First, it suggests that "consciousness" and "the possibilities for experiences" (McLaren, 1989) are fundamentally different for women than they are for men. Second, it implies that differences are necessarily the case if this consciousness and the "possibilities for experiences" are an essential part of the substructure upon which those "positions" are built.

The Aristotelian logic that constructed the notion of "citizenry", and the intense political participation that it demanded, depended not only upon a clear recognition of necessary differences but upon those differences themselves. Women were

"necessary conditions for" but not "integral parts of" political life (Ackelsberg & Diamond, 1987). The Aristotelian description of "public" and "private" spheres as "masculine" and "feminine" attests to a logic supported by gender differences made necessary because of differences in "possibilities for experiences." Gender discrimination is not a manifestation of a selective and exclusionary ideological process but is a fundamental part of that process (Glenn, 1985).

If gender is a part of the ideological process, one would expect to see it emerge in both the dominant and subordinant ideologies. Gender may be the one variable that transcends ideological thought altogether, perhaps because it has been so entrenched that the analytic tools to examine it are not available. Acker's (1990) notion of "gendered organizations" is useful here. It provides the analytic tool necessary to understand the nature of gender hegemony that remains largely unexplained by simple appeal to the notion of discrimination.

Acker (1990) suggests that a systematic theory of gender and organizations is necessary for a number of reasons. Gender segregation as well as income and status inequality are partly created through organizational processes. Organizations invent and reproduce cultural images of gender and gender identity, particularly masculinity. Given that it is important to examine the notion of gendered organizations, it is necessary to look at Acker's (1990) definition drawn from the work of Connell (1987)

as well as West and Zimmerman (1987).

> To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not in addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender. p. 146

Acker (1990) describes five interacting processes through which gendering occurs. She warns that, in practice, they are parts of the same reality even though they are analytically distinct. These five interacting processes offer lenses for the analysis and interpretation of the data in this case study.

The Construction of Divisions Along Lines of Gender

Acker (1990) suggests that divisions along lines of gender can include areas such as: labor; allowed behaviors; locations in physical space; and power. In this particular case study division along gender lines was readily apparent. The entire administrative team was male. One of the administrators is a self-described "mean son-of-a-bitch" (Field notes, November 5, 1990). Over the course of five years, four female administrators left the district and were replaced by male counterparts, one of

whom was not fully certified as an administrator. The vast majority of teachers were female and in the area of Special Services there were no male teachers.

The four parents who confronted the Board were female, as was the individual who filed the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) complaint. Each of the women who organized the group called "Face to Face" had supportive spouses who did not take an active role in the group. The president of the Board was female and she was joined by one other woman. The remaining four members of the Board were male.

During the on-site investigation by the OCR, three women conducted the interviews, read the files, and wrote the final report. When the second complaint was filed, one male was sent to investigate. Throughout the entire two years that the case study was being conducted the administrators never mentioned the situation. The newspaper publisher, a male, wrote critical editorials about the Board's response to the parents. The vast majority of the news coverage came from his female editor.

Allowable behaviors for women do not include aggression. It appears problematic then to cast the four women in a role that is contentious. Reference to Glenn's (1985) work on families may explain some of the dynamics. Woman is central to the family. The family is a singular, fixed, and unchanging unit that enjoys the status of "agent." Because women are valued as central to the family and because family implies "agency" based upon

consensual decision-making, women are, in effect, denied individual status.

This conceptualization shifts attention away from the issues of gender relations in the family unit and focuses upon the notion of "agency." What is done by, to, and for families becomes the focus of theoretical speculation while "who" does what and why remains relatively unproblematic. Hence, terms like parent serve to describe agents within the family but are linguistically incapable of describing the tacit gender division that serves to support the organizational structure itself. The closest that one can come to understanding the idea of parent (someone who does the work of the family) is to think of a woman. It can be suggested that parent is an inherently "gendered" concept.

In the context of this case study, the women were fighting for the right to access the decision-making process in order to serve the educational needs of their children. In one way, their "contentiousness" is easily understood as an attempt to maintain the integrity of the family unit -- something that good parents do for their family. Parents/women can "advocate" for their families but can't "act" within the organization because there is no role assigned to that function.

Acker's (1990) ideas on "organizational logic" are worth citing because they are helpful in understanding how parent/women roles can be excluded from educational structures whose existence

depends, in great measure, on parental satisfaction and support.

> In organizational logic, both jobs and hierarchies are abstract categories that have no occupants, no human bodies, no gender... In organizational logic, filling the abstract job is a disembodied worker who exists only for the work... Too many obligations outside the boundaries of the job would make the worker unsuited for the position. The closest the disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another female takes care of his personal needs and his children. While the realities of life in industrial capitalism never allowed men to live out this ideal, it was the goal for labor unions and the image of the worker in social and economic theory. The woman worker, assumed to have legitimate obligations other than those required by the job, did not fit with the abstract job. (p. 149)

Now, if job is an implicitly gendered concept as Acker suggests, then organizational logic would not recognize any role for parents/women in the organization. Parents/women have no job and cannot be evaluated within the organization. They cannot be part of the hierarchy because that would depend upon a job description and evaluation to rationalize placement.

The response of the Board to a request that a task force be

created to look into the problems with Special Services revealed this organizational logic. The Board president wrote:

> One request of the parents, that of a task force, was denied by the Board on three different occasions. In my opinion, there were valid reasons for this denial. Special Services is a sensitive, emotional area for many parents and children....It would be difficult to create a Task Force of qualified persons who could make intelligent recommendations without a large amount of time and training in the area of special services.... The most recent committee of this type was that of establishing concepts of Character Education traits to be incorporated into the curriculum. Several years ago, an ad hoc (sic) committee was appointed to evaluate the facilities of the school district. These types of committees have been used and will continue to be used in the future. (Personal communication, Nan Black, March 27, 1990)

The "valid" overt reasons for denying the request for a task force are obviously drawn from sexist assumptions that are fairly familiar - emotionality, sensitivity, and lack of sufficient intellect. The hidden rationale may emerge from organizational logic that presupposes gender neutrality when there is none. That is, "tasks" or "jobs" can only be performed by the organization. They must be under the control of the organization

to meet the needs of the organization. In this case, it was organizationally logical to allow "task forces" that were initiated by the administration and the Board but to deny one that didn't begin within the organization or serve its purposes.

Parental involvement "is not usually taken to mean participation in daily school activities, but in PTA work or in home-based support for children's schoolwork" (David, 1989 p. 57). David (1989) is describing women's work; work that is supportive of the organization. Parents/women are a necessary element for but not an integral part of the school. That is how they serve the organization, by supporting schoolwork so that the organization can perform their "jobs."

It was alright, even commendable, that these women "advocate" for their children's right to a free, appropriate, public education. When they attempted to "act", they broke the implicit professional/lay boundary and defied the organizational logic that rationalized the gendered organizational structure. The parents/women needed to be stopped and the mechanism to do that was in organizational symbolism and imagery.

Construction of Symbols and Images

Another of the interacting processes that takes place to promote "gendering" is the "construction of symbols and images to explain, express, and reinforce, or sometimes oppose" the division of labor along gender lines (Acker, 1990, p. 146). This particular case study revealed linguistic symbolism that divided

the school "organization" from the parents. There were specific and distinct techniques for promoting the images of the organization and the parents.

Parental Images

The parents' concerns were viewed as trivial, troublesome and suspect. Their formal and informal requests were met with disdain and outright anger by Board members. The reference to the four women as "girls" at the November 15th Board meeting stands out because it was so blatant. References made to the four women as "bitches" also casts a light on the gendered perception of the administration toward these "parents." There were more subtle efforts to construct the image of these four women.

At one point during the November meeting, the only other female on the Board left her chair and walked behind the four women, standing with her back to the audience. She referred to them as "women" and put her hand on the shoulder of one of them. "You support each other and that's what you need -- like Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous -- you're happy to reach success." In addition, the Board president suggested that some of the difficulty stemmed from the inability of parents to accept the fact that their children function on a "low cognitive level" and are not "LD" (learning disabled). The president also followed that comment with a remark to the women: "I know this is hard to understand."

During the course of the evening the women were told that they were "wrong" or "not right" on numerous occasions. Not only were they "wrong", one Board member suggested that the "girls" were not needed to represent the community. He told them angrily that "...there were people in the community who do have guts enough to stand up...and speak their piece." It was ironic that he used alleged nameless, faceless people with "guts" to devalue the "guts" of the four women who were standing before him to speak <u>their</u> piece.

The superintendent spoke only three times that evening but succeeded in twice blaming the women for the problems. In a response to questions about state-mandated mastery objectives he said: "Not to adopt the concept would, in my opinion, handicap a student a great deal in terms of how they achieve on achievement tests." The implicit assumption is that those who ask questions may be the ones who cause the handicap. The third and final comment paints the district as victim: "Administrators and teachers have to deliver bad news to parents. They [parents] want to shoot the messenger."

What appeared to be taking place at that particular meeting and throughout the course of events surrounding this case study was a systematic attempt on the part of the district to establish dominance. This was done most effectively by casting dispersion upon the women who sought to act in a way that was not consistent with the institution's perception of "parents." To suggest that

the women and their children were not too bright was a fairly simplistic technique for maintaining control.

What was more covert, and probably more effective, was drawing upon the women's role as parents. They were blamed for: having handicapped children; costing the district money; not being "accepting" of their children's disabilities; questioning the school's practices and thereby "handicapping" the children further. When all else failed, they "shot" the educators who were trying to help. This position effectively allowed the district to remain blameless. It enabled the administration and Board of Education to avoid any accountability. Blaming the parents/women explained why "Face to Face" was characterized by the Board as a support group, like AA and OA. In the eyes of the Board and the administration, the women had the problem, not them.

Organizational Images

Connell (1987) uses the term "hegemonic masculinity" to advance the notion that heterosexual male sexuality legitimates organizational power that is formed around a dominance over women and in opposition to other masculinities. Acker (1990) states that: "hegemonic masculinity is typified by the image of the strong, technically competent, authoritative leader who is sexually potent and attractive, has a family, and has his emotions under control" (p. 153). This image described the superintendent.

The superintendent was an avid hunter. He was perceived as "a numbers man" who, even in written communications, used the term "boss" to refer to his superiors as well as himself. He was generally recognized as arrogant which angered the community members he dealt with. He had a wife and four children who were always there when he faced difficulties with the Board or community. He hired four administrators during his tenure as superintendent, replacing two females with males so that there were no women on his administrative team.

The notion of "hegemonic masculinity" offers a perspective from which to view the superintendent's negative perception of anyone who questioned his administration. In this case it was the four women and the newspaper publisher. These individuals came to be known as the "four bitches and the prick at the newspaper." Casting the "parents" as "bitches" and the publisher as a "prick" reinforces the notion that male heterosexual sexuality does indeed play a role in legitimizing organizational power by dominating women and opposing other masculinities (Connell, 1987).

The superintendent appeared to be building a board that reflected his image -- hegemonic masculinity. This particular theme ran through the events in this case study. There was an obvious need for the Board to present itself as strong and knowledgeable. Common tactics were: pressure for unanimity; discouragement of dissenting votes; and devaluing divergent

points of view. The Board also utilized language and physical space to gain advantage.

The use of the junior high library for Board meetings historically signaled problems. It was traditionally the arena where contentious issues were addressed by the Board. There might also have been a psychological advantage to removing the "bones of contention" from the Board office. While the table arrangements were somewhat different at the November Board meeting, the "hotseat" retained its symbolic strength. The four women all sat in armless chairs with no table for their notes.

The control of language was evident from the beginning of the meeting. The Board had a typed script from which to work. The use of the first person plural "we" to refer to the women was used condescendingly: "Now we know our first step is to not call the State Department..." or "...had we taken the proper channels." Ignoring the women and their comments was also used to stop any challenge to the Board's authority.

The use of words provided an effective means of controlling the flow of ideas. Linguistic negotiation (Bates, 1981) was used most effectively by the vice-president of the Board to mask the issues. For example: The Board "addressed" the problem rather than "corrected" it; "problems" became "allegations; "tested" became "evaluated." This Board member was well aware of the importance of controlling perceptions. In a Board meeting months before he stated: We need to convey to the community a sense and

perception of openness....The community views this Board as very closed."

Linguistic negotiation or the right to name the world (Bates, 1981) is a tool that the dominant ideology uses to control perceptions and silence the subordinant ideology. This administration and Board of Education used this technique to gain control of what they perceived as a volatile situation. The intent was to recast the problem in the eyes of the public.

Instead of confronting the issue as one that entailed a disturbed relationship between parents and the district, it enabled the district to paint the parents/women as problematic. This put the district in a position to "help" the parents deal with "their" problems. When the "parents" rebuffed the help, they became gendered "bitches." When the newspaper publisher wrote editorials that were viewed as sympathetic to the "parents" he became a gendered "prick at the newspaper."

Interactions

Acker's (1990) third process for developing a gendered organization entails interactions between and among men and women. These interactions make manifest the patterns of dominance and submission that allow organizations to remain hegemonic. In the case study there were a number of important interactions that informed the analysis and interpretation of the data, particularly the relationship between the superintendent and the Board president.

"The Harry and Nan Show" was the phrase used to describe the Board meetings that were conducted over the past few years since Nan Black became Board president. Basically, Nan Black was perceived to be taking her cues from the superintendent. Superintendent Jones was clearly in charge of the meetings. That is what provoked curiosity about the November 15th meeting. Dr. Jones made only three brief statements: two of those were upon direct, verbal request from the president. This was a substantial deviation from the usual Board meeting format.

"Silence" and the lack of interaction on the part of the superintendent was a protective mechanism that he invoked when the necessity arose. But there may have been more to it. A few years earlier, another female Board president maneuvered the hiring of Dr. Jones as the new superintendent. In the process she alienated the constituency and lost her bid for re-election.

The pattern seems to be to use women to front the issues and to take the heat and blame. Given their status as supporters rather than actors, these women may have found the situation to be fulfilling of their ideological role. The superintendent may have simply been adept at tapping this hegemonic resource when it served his purpose; he became not only a victimizer, but in the long run, a victim of the "false generosity of paternalism" (Freire, 1973; 1985). The "silence" then takes on a new interpretation. It is the recognition that hegemony is operating in the organization and that there are those who have learned to

use it by letting it take its course. The issue only becomes problematic for the organization when the process of "conscientization" (Freire, 1973; 1985) in the subordinate group begins.

The interaction between the Board president and the four women was complex and interesting. It exposed the singular flaw in the organizational logic that had, to this point, sustained the "status quo" in the district. The "notorious November 15th Board meeting" served as the perfect example of this fundamental error. The president of the Board assumed complete control of the meeting. She utilized tactics that were effective in gaining and maintaining control throughout the entire evening: interruption; insult; reprimand; lecture. One of the women called it "demeaning and repressive." Nan Black was the "boss" of the meeting in every sense of the word. She even acted without the usual deference to the superintendent. The four "girls" appeared to "take it." They sat and listened. They left defeated, one in tears. The newspaper ran a front page picture of the Board president "gesturing" to the four women as they sat six feet from her. Her jaw was set, her hand pointing like an angry teacher reprimanding students.

The Board's interpretation of the meeting was that the district was intact while the four women were put in their place. Within one week of the broadcast of the meeting over the local cable access channel, however, the issue was being debated in the

local newspaper. Two prominent men made the decision to run for the Board after they viewed a video recording of the meeting given to them by the women. The "notorious November 15th Board meeting" may have been the beginning of the end for the superintendent and the Board president.

The fact that the meeting worked against the organization seems to defy organizational logic. All the elements necessary for the administration and Board to retain the upper hand were in place and operational. They had control. But that control was being exercised by a woman and organizational logic does not recognize females as a legitimate source of power. Women as victims is an acceptable perception within the framework of both the dominant and subordinant ideologies; a woman as victimizer is not. Nan Black, serving as the true organizational leader, rather than the traditional "symbolic" leader who deferred to the superintendent, was not logical in the organizational sense. Attempts at "symbolic transvestitism" failed. No matter how close she came to looking and acting like the leader of the school district she would never be ideologically legitimate (Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987; Kanter, 1975; Reskin & Roos, 1987).

Individual Identity

The fourth process for producing gendered organizations outlined by Acker (1990) is one of individual identity. This process includes a "consciousness of the other three aspects of gender, such as, in organizations, the choice of appropriate

work, language use, clothing, and presentation of self as a gendered member of an organization (Reskin and Roos, 1987)" (p. 147). This case study demonstrated this "consciousness" in a number of individuals.

The Board president made a conscious, carefully planned effort to lead the district through the difficult situation posed by the parents. Her symbolic transvestitism, something that the popular literature promotes as necessary for the success of female leaders, failed. Months later, when she reflected upon what had happened, she wrote about trying to establish her individual identity as it related to the organization. In a letter to one of the "girls" she wrote:

> After much deliberation, I have decided to record some of my thoughts regarding the special services issue and my service on the Board of Education. For several months, I have given a lot of consideration to these issues. I have thought about them when I am cleaning house, when I am doing laundry, when I am preparing meals, when I am driving my car, when I go to bed at night, when I am in church -- I say this only to indicate that my views have not come about lightly. I have spent countless hours reviewing the entire situation. (Personal communication, Nan Black, March 27, 1990)

Nan Black's struggle to understand her role in the organization

was obviously tied to her role as a woman. Her role was to support the superintendent by deferring to his directives. The editor of the newspaper characterized her role as "Dr. Jones' puppet." When the superintendent recognized that it was not in his best interest to conduct the meetings as usual, he silenced himself, creating the illusion that the president acted alone. This required her to change her image. She had to put on the symbolic accouterments that legitimated organizational leadership -- hegemonic masculinity. Her own words revealed a "consciousness" of her identity that was not present at the time she prepared for the meeting:

> After the October meeting, the Board decided that we would answer the questions and "stand up" for the district against the very strong and unfounded allegations stated by the Parent Group. A second change that I would make in conducting the November meeting is that I would be more gentle with my comments. The Board had decided to present a "strong" front in support of the district - and perhaps I came on too "strong" and should have been less adamant about the insults to the entire district. I guess I am human, I guess I was tired of listening to our administrators being insulted with unfounded allegations. I guess I was tired of the negative press that the entire school was receiving. I did not intend

> to come across so rude and uncaring, but apparently I was perceived as that way, and I feel badly about that perception... (Personal communication, Nan Black, March 27, 1990)

Being "strong", "adamant" and "standing up" for the district made this woman feel "badly" because she was perceived as "rude and uncaring." Brownmiller (1984) provides insight into the ideology that guides assessments of feminine anger.

> [A]nger becomes the most unfeminine emotion a woman can show. Anger in a woman is "unattractive." An angry woman is hard, mean, and nasty; she is unreliably, unprettily out of control... The endless forbearance demanded of women, described as the feminine virtue of patience, prohibits an angry response. (p. 210)

Nan Black was angry that night in November. The four women in the "hotseat" were patient and "ladylike."

What was particularly compelling was Black's tacit assumption that she failed because she was "human." This suggests two things. First, there may be, as Acker (1990) suggests, a sense in which the organization employs abstract individuals to fill roles and is therefore beyond "humanness." Secondly, Nan Black's humanness required that she not "stand up" or be "strong" and that she listen to the insults and the negative press. Nan Black came to the realization that her individual identity was constructed as a victim not as an agent.

The four women who initiated the demands on the Board of Education posed another view of the "consciousness" that was apparent over the course of the case study. Each individual appeared to recognize and work within the ideological parameters established by the district and legitimated by the community. These women appeared before the Board as a group. Their spouses were all present and on occasion would speak out from their seats in the audience. Their demeanor at the meeting was not contentious. Their attempts to correct statements or to interject ideas was quickly rebuffed and on a few occasions they were ignored altogether. These women were patient. One of them cried when they left the meeting, another stated softly: "We'll be back."

The women were the victims and the community rallied not to support the issue but to react against the treatment the women received at the hands of the Board, particularly the Board president. The women were able to use the reaction to convince two prominent businessmen to run for the Board of Education. The men won and the new Board's first action was to depose Nan Black. This was a symbolic victory against those who would defy the hegemony of gender. None of the four women ever considered running for the Board of Education. The spouse of one of them is now a Board member. When asked why she did not consider running for the Board herself she stated:

...I don't work well with committees. Because I get up

> and cuss and I don't, I don't function well with five other ass holes sittin' around a table. I would rather be behind the scene and do what I do best and that's agitate....Every organization needs to have that loose cannon. (Interview, N. Read, September, 1990)

In terms of individual identity and working within the ideological context she was probably correct in assuming that she may not fit.

Creation and Conceptualization of Social Structures

Acker's (1990) final process is one that suggests that gender is a constitutive element in organizational logic that frames the underlying relations of structures. In this case the structure was the school district. This process of "gendering" underlies both theoretical development of research and practical action of administrators and Boards of Education. While the theoretical work and the practical application of that work may appear gender neutral and utilize gender neutral language, they are not. "Four parents and the publisher at the newspaper" are descriptions that emerge as manifestations of organizational logic as well as theoretical and practical propriety. "Four bitches and a prick at the newspaper" are descriptions that emerge as manifestations of the gendered framework that underlies organizational logic as well as theoretical and practical impropriety.

The language to accommodate the strategies and activities of

the four women is limited. Within the organization, individuals who did what the parents/women did would be seen as "change agents," "decision makers," or "educational leaders." The fact that they were parents/women with no "job" and no rationale for existence within the organization prohibits consideration of their role in the education of their children. Because the organization cannot describe what it is that parents do, relative to the school, and because they do not evaluate them, the organization ignores and devalues them.

The hegemony of gender is seldom questioned because the theoretical tools are not yet developed to explain what has taken place. The tools of the organization were utilized by the women to force the school to confront its own illogical moves. One of the women said: "What you need to do is to take their stick and beat them over the head with it." The term "bitch" became a rallying cry to mark those who would defy the school system. The "prick" was the "masculinity" that threatened the male administration. Sexualizing those outside of the school seemed to be the only way to describe how they were related to the organizational culture. The language that describes and explains the organizational dynamics is theoretical. The language that describes dynamics that lie outside the organization's logic is sexual and offensive. This makes it easier to ignore and might explain the theoretical underdevelopment of the hegemony of gender.

It is not surprising that the hegemony of gender was the dynamic that enabled the four women to make a change in the administration. The confrontation would not have taken place had hegemony not been a key element in the events that occurred. The "consciousness" that emerged was one of recognizing the hegemony and using it to accomplish a goal. For the women the goal was to gain a voice in the decision making process. For the superintendent and the Board, it was to put the parents/women in their place by relying upon hegemony of gender to sway public opinion away from four "bitches." The error was that the Board did not anticipate the full power of the hegemony of gender that they confronted. The superintendent and the Board president did not anticipate that what was worse than four "bitches" was a symbolic transvestite. Nan Black simply did not possess the central quality that those who are victims of the hegemony of gender expect in leaders -- maleness.

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